

**DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE**

**PRESENTATION TO THE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL**

**UNITED STATES SENATE**

**SUBJECT: RECRUITING**

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**UNITED STATES AIR FORCE**

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## **RECRUITING**

On behalf of the 3,000 men and women of Air Force Recruiting Service, thank you for the opportunity to appear again before this committee. I'm very proud to be associated with the Air Force recruiting effort. I assure you that our nation can be proud of the selfless dedication, integrity, and effort that Air Force recruiters put forth every day in fulfilling the Air Force recruiting mission. We know recruiting is the cornerstone for readiness because it determines the Air Force ability to respond to any call with trained, professional airmen. However, we continue to recruit in an environment unlike anything we have experienced over the last 20 years.

The continued strong economy with its low unemployment, as well as higher college enrollments, a low inclination among America's youth to consider joining the military, and a declining awareness among young people of the advantages and benefits of life in the military, creates an environment extremely challenging for today's recruiters. Until last year, we were able to meet our recruiting objectives with significantly less manning and less funding than is necessary today. Our recruiters will continue to respond to these challenges with their traditional pride and professionalism. I am pleased to inform you that in spite of the increased recruiting demands of FY99, our recruiters were still able to average over 2.6 new enlisted accessions per month per recruiter, and actually shipped more new airmen to basic training in FY99 than in any year since FY92. Consequently, we are confident the additional manning and funding resources made available over the past year will help us to persevere this year and "turn the corner" as we head into FY01.

## **ENLISTED RECRUITING**

Our FY99 enlisted accession goal increased from 32,800 to 33,800 at the beginning of the fiscal year because of continuing retention problems throughout the Air Force. We were not well postured for this goal increase because in coping with the goal increase for FY98 we accessed many airmen in the summer of FY98 that we normally would have scheduled for accession in the fall of FY99. This means we started FY99 with a shortage of approximately 2,000 Delayed Entry Program airmen in our “bank”--that is, enlistees scheduled to enter active duty within the next 12 months. We missed the FY99 goal by a margin of 1,732, putting us at 95.4% of our requirement. In terms of quality, we were still able to exceed our goal of 99% “Tier 1” accessions (high school graduates or individuals with 15 or more semester hours of college). However, we were slightly below our goal of 80% of accessions scoring in the top half (Cat I-III A) of the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT), achieving only 75.9%. While the Cat I-III A rate has been dropping over the last four years, the good news is that attrition at Basic Military Training has stayed below 10 percent for the same period of time. FY99 was also a good year for minority recruiting as we achieved the highest percentage of Black and Hispanic enlisted accessions in recruiting history, accessing 17.5% and 7.4%, respectively. We also accessed 8,685 females (27.1% of total accessions) in FY00, more than any year since FY89.

As we struggled through FY99 we started seeing a warning light as we anticipated the FY00 goal of 34,000. In eight of the last nine months of FY99, we failed to make our goal for new enlistment contracts. As a result, we fell short of our FY99 contract goal of 35,000 by a margin of 4,131. This means we started FY00 with a shortage of approximately 4,000 Delayed Entry Program airmen in the “bank.” Going back to FY77, we have never started with so few airmen in the “bank.” In fact, we have missed our goals for shipping to Basic Military Training

(BMT) by more than 2,200 over the last four months (November through February) and all indications are that we will miss March through May accession goals as well. Current year seniors will not graduate until the end of May, and last year's graduates are difficult to access. March through May are typically tough recruiting months--so this isn't a complete surprise, but it probably means that the hole we're in now will be deeper by the first of June. In addition to this problem, shortages of new enlistment contracts continue in FY00. Meeting our monthly goals for new contracts will be touch and go through May. This indicates that, even with increased manning, it will be extremely difficult to overcome our accession deficits from June through September. Clearly, Air Force Recruiting Service is in grave danger of not only missing its accession mission for a second straight year, but of missing by a wider margin than in FY99. If current trends continue, we may finish FY00 well over 2,000 airmen short of our non-prior service accession goal of 34,000.

Even so, we are confident FY00 will be the end of the bad news for Air Force Recruiting Service. The increased manning and funding we've received will restore our success in obtaining new enlistment contracts for the months of June and beyond. These corrections were not in place soon enough to fix our FY00 problem, but we anticipate our Delayed Entry Program "bank" will be much healthier at the start of FY01 than it was for FY00. In addition to a healthy bank for FY01, our increased manning levels and advertising reach should enable us to produce more new enlistment contracts in FY01 than in any Fiscal Year of the 90's. All this should be possible while retaining our 99% Tier 1 standard, which the training demands of our high-tech aerospace force require.

## **OFFICER RECRUITING**

Our officer accessions recruiters face a daunting task in persuading doctors, dentists, nurses and other medical professionals with high-earnings potential to become members of the Air Force. Despite this, FY99 was a largely successful year in Health Professions (HP) recruiting. Air Force Recruiting Service attained at least 100 percent production in all of its health professions programs except for nurses. Requirements for previous nurse experience have made recruiting nurses particularly difficult, with the result that we could recruit only 200 of a desired 285 nurses in FY99. FY00 HP recruiting promises to be another successful year, with the same stipulation that our nurse goal remains difficult to achieve.

In the line officer accessions arena, we successfully met all of our FY99 Officer Training School (OTS) goals. Air Force Recruiting Service OTS production provides short-term responsiveness for line officer accessions, since both the U.S. Air Force Academy and Air Force ROTC production pipelines require long-term commitments.

In terms of FY00, the OTS outlook is generally very good. Despite a 21% increase in the OTS goal over FY99, we have already selected enough individuals to make our goal in all but the technical areas. Recruiting 255 technical officers (those with engineering and science degrees) versus the 171 of FY99 is our most significant OTS recruiting challenge.

## **BUDGETING**

One area receiving much recent attention has been the overall recruiting budget. Advertising expenditures are at the top of this list, and have increased substantially in an effort to meet the challenges we now face. Overall advertising expenditures went from \$16.6 million in FY98 to \$74.0 million in FY99, and \$63.7 million for FY00. In particular, paid TV went from zero to \$51.5 million in FY99 (Note: This funding level purchased airtime for both FY99 and

FY00), and will level off at \$30.0 million for FY00 (purchasing airtime for FY01). Local ads register second on our expenditures breakdown, with a total cost of \$7.3 million for FY00.

Another significant item on the ledger is the Air Force Experience initiative, which uses vans to carry a static display and simulators across the country in order to generate awareness and leads. This initiative, if fully adopted, would eventually include 20 vans. This approach is essential to help us overcome a low propensity to enlist and build a healthier recruiting market. An ongoing advertising campaign--year after year--is the most effective way to develop a healthy recruiting market. Consequently, our POM initiatives through FY07 include requests for paid TV expenditures as high as \$40.8 million.

Enlistment bonuses make up another crucial leg to the funding requirements of recruiting. In the first quarter of FY98, we began providing bonuses to 115 different career fields. These bonuses can be very effective in producing not only new enlistment contracts, but also decisions to enlist for a period of six years. Our bonuses now range from \$1,000 to \$13,000 depending on specialties, enlistment term, and time of enlistment. For example, in the months of February through May of this year, we are offering the mechanically and electronically inclined a \$1,000 dollar bonus in addition to any other bonuses simply as an incentive to enter active duty during these difficult months. Since we began offering bonuses for six year enlistments, we have seen the number of six year enlistments swell from 10% in FY98 to 50% in FY99. The vast majority of these, almost 14,000 in FY99, are commitments made before arriving at basic training. We are confident these longer periods of enlistment will pay dividends in the fiscal years to come.

A final component of our budget picture includes programmed funding to support our recently granted plus-up of 300 additional manpower authorizations. This portion of the budget, which is made up of operations, maintenance and equipment costs, merits special attention

because of the great returns which it will yield. Even though our recruiting funding has increased substantially in the past 18 months, we note the Air Force cost per accession (for non-prior service recruits) has increased from \$4,369 per recruit in FY97 to only \$5,739 per recruit in FY99, not an unreasonable cost per accession for the quality of today's airmen.

## **ADVERTISING**

As you know, advertising has been a high interest item for the past year. In particular, OSD issued a report with several recommendations. One particular recommendation involved the establishment of "e-recruiters" situated in a facility dedicated to handling, by quick e-mail response, the increasing number of web-based leads. We will continue to pursue this initiative as we evolve in web recruiting. Additionally, we are pursuing the recommendation for retargeting media buys toward younger sub-segments of the target demographic. Another recommendation related to measuring advertising agency performance; hence, although we have been satisfied with our ad agency's performance, we are revisiting the performance basis of the contract.

The Air Force continues to recognize the Internet as a revolutionary tool for meeting our advertising and recruiting objectives. Our investment in web technology has grown throughout the last few years, as have the measurements that we use to gauge our success. For instance, in FY99, airforce.com had 1.9 million visitors and 79,000 inquiries--a 100 percent increase in both categories over FY98. In addition, in recent years the Air Force garnered several top awards, the most recent being the "Omni Intermedia Silver Award," which was presented in 1999. This continuing Internet success can be tied directly to the enhancements we've made to our web site and interactive advertising strategy. In 1999 we completely revised airforce.com, capitalizing on the "Flight Plan" advertising theme used in other traditional media. We also designed and

created micro-sites within our web site, which streamlined the navigation process and better-organized information for each targeted market. On-line users now average over eight minutes per session on our site.

Throughout the few short years of Air Force online advertising and recruiting we've seen many other firsts: the first military branch to use "enliven" and "flash" technologies; the first military branch to conduct live web casts; and the first military branch to employ audio banners and "webmercial" advertising. We realize however, that with a robust economy and a difficult recruiting mission, we cannot live on our past successes--they will not be enough to sustain us in the future. The Air Force is continuing to capitalize on all new Internet technology and we look to maintain success in electronic recruiting well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In FY99, we broadened our advertising market and we are continuing on that course in FY00. The two broad objectives for Air Force advertising are lead generation and brand building. The first is short-term "ask for the order" communication. The second is long-term "franchise" building, designed to build positive awareness and predisposition over time. With an eroding "brand identity," we found that we must present the Air Force "brand" to a younger audience to allow them time to form positive impressions toward the Air Force well before making their life decisions. All of our branding efforts--such as television, magazines and the web site--target a 15-22 year old with a male skew. However, lead generation continues to be our top priority. Our lead-generating efforts--such as direct mail, newspaper ads, and our web site--target a 17-24 year-old, also with a male skew. Regardless, we will continue to target those who are presently age and education qualified.

The development of the creative message currently in use started in the spring of 1999. This creative message, "Flight Plan," evolved from a premise that you can experience life to the

fullest while building an exciting career. We learned that there are three key misperceptions that must be addressed if the Air Force is to be included in the target's considered set of options. Our first idea correction was to start telling the message, "You are not confined to the base 24 hours per day--you do have a 'life' in the Air Force." Our second idea correction involved assuring the target market that beginning a career in the Air Force does not necessarily put a person behind his/her peers who went to college or started working after high school. Finally, we began to emphasize to young people that careers in the Air Force are not just about flying planes. The three creative executions in "Flight Plan" feature a point of view from different Air Force recruits. In their own unique way, they reveal that you are able to have a life in the Air Force--through music, motorcycles, swimming, etc. They represent different career fields available in the Air Force. Also, each of the characters is proud of their ambitions and the level of responsibility we can make available to them.

While we are solving the problems in our advertising program, we are faced with a bigger advertising dilemma that money will not cure. How do we present a relevant recruiting message to young people that also preserves the national sense of duty, honor, country? How do we overcome "service to self" with "service to nation"? In the past, the military played a defining role in the lives of American families, and joining the military was usually viewed as a good thing--often expected. Today, there are few bridges to connect young people with military service. The dwindling number of veterans--fathers and mothers who inspired young people to choose the military--is causing a waning interest in military service, reflected by the growing number of young people who go straight to college after high school. In the face of all these obstacles, our challenge is to craft an advertising message that presents and preserves the overall professionalism of military service but appeals to the specific needs of the young people we are

trying to recruit. Often, the two themes conflict. As the Air Force enters the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we will continue to monitor trends within the recruiting market and make appropriate adjustments to our advertising strategy.

Regarding the "service to nation" message, there are several things we ask members of Congress to consider doing which will help us deliver this message and the "duty, honor, country" message. First, we ask that you include these themes in your comments to your constituents at whatever venue you feel appropriate. Second, produce radio and television public service announcements, to air in your districts and states, touting the value of military service to young Americans, letting them know military service is the basis for securing the freedoms we all hold dear. We have a plan to help produce these announcements if you wish. Third, encourage the governors of your states to work with the state's educators to permit more liberal access of recruiters to potential applicants and to reinforce the themes of national service in our schools. All of these initiatives would help us immensely in generating awareness amongst community influencers and potential applicants.

## **QUALITY OF LIFE**

As recruiters are our front line producers, we place significant emphasis on those issues directly affecting their quality of life. For this reason, we are looking at various incentives for direct production recruiters to encourage airmen to join the recruiting force. This incentive would lessen the burden of living away from the military installation support structure.

Although recruiter morale remains upbeat, it is a major concern in these trying times. Our current team of Air Force recruiters is working long and hard to meet the personnel needs of our nation; we believe our current efforts to put more recruiters in the field is just as important to

quality of life as it is to production because it will reduce the personal sacrifices recruiters are making to fulfill our mission.

In 1998 we administered a Behavioral Health Survey to over 1,300 AFRS personnel. The use of the Behavioral Health Survey combined with focus interviews indicated the biggest quality of life issues impacting workforce retention were balancing work and life problems while geographically separated from support resources. Air Force Recruiting Service worked with Air Education and Training Command and the Air Force Surgeon General to secure annual support for a nationwide program which provides geographically separated personnel and their families 24-hour toll-free assistance to deal with their problems. This program, LifeWorks, has helped recruiter families with consumer assistance, legal matters, financial concerns, personal and relationship issues, grief and loss counseling, referral to mental health and pastoral care, parenting, child care, schooling, referral to special needs programs, stress management, marital problems, depression, consumer information for big-ticket purchases, and more. Implementation cost in FY99 was under \$46,000 and will be similar for the current fiscal year. Please be assured that we are doing everything within our means to improve the quality of life of our recruiters.

Another quality of life initiative we are working is the expansion of opportunities for leased unaccompanied and family housing. Eventually, we hope the current initiatives to increase the Basic Allowance for Housing will become reality and alleviate the need for leased quarters. Until that happens, unless the Congress takes action to permit payment of higher cost leases in these areas, our recruiters in high-cost areas will be forced to live in substandard housing farther from their recruiting zones than they do today. Our recruiters deserve quality housing in safe neighborhoods.

## **RECRUITING INITIATIVES**

The heightened interest in the recruiting mission has produced numerous proposals for improving our situation. One topic that we welcome is the issue of G.I. Bill reform. In these competitive times, many of our potential service members are not impressed by the Montgomery G.I. Bill. Benefits are a big factor in the minds of today's high school graduates—we can only improve our lot by enhancing this package. We believe our most significant initiative is a recent authorization to increase our recruiting force by 300. More recruiters, from E-4 through E-7, will greatly expand our ability to tell the Air Force story across America.

Regarding the suggestion to delegate some of our front line recruiting efforts, we remain convinced that Air Force service members will do the best job of selling the Air Force. As far as shorter enlistments are concerned, we believe such action would negate our efforts to maintain a force within current fiscal and manpower constraints which is capable of executing the national strategy. Some of our technical training programs take longer than 12 months, and we are committed to giving the American taxpayer a solid return on the investment and our nation a "ready" force. Length of enlistment isn't actually the big disincentive that many think it is, as our high number of six year enlistees clearly shows.

As you've seen in this testimony, the number of initiatives that has been entertained is substantial. Before the conclusion, one other recently implemented initiative is worthy of mention. The Air Force Recruiting Information Support System (AFRISS) is now fielded, opening a wide range of new capabilities. Applicant data now resides on a new computer system that allows recruiters to immediately update the data and access production statistics via the web. Recruiters can now present a multimedia show to applicants, fill out application forms, and transmit applicant information to HQ AFRS real-time via the web.

## **CONCLUSION**

Although we were ill-prepared, in terms of manning and funding, to meet the increased accession requirements driven by on-going retention problems, we are confident the appropriate actions are being taken to address these issues; however, it is unlikely the impact of these actions will be apparent until FY01 and beyond. The men and women of Air Force Recruiting Service will continue to do all that we ask of them and more. We ask that you keep their quality of life foremost in your deliberations. Achieving future recruiting goals with the quality of individuals needed to sustain the finest aerospace force in the world will require your continued support. We look forward to working with you and the American public to ensure a solid, continuing foundation of highly talented professionals in this great country's Air Force.